

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Bush Administration announced new regulations on the H-2A Guestworker Program on Thursday that would depress wages and working conditions for agricultural workers in America. Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31), House Democratic Vice Chair-elect and the only congressional member from Southern California on the House Committee on Ways and Means, issued the following statement:

“American workers are facing challenging times. There are 10.3 million unemployed persons in our country right now, and just last month 533,000 more jobs were lost. This baffling action by the Bush Administration to lower wages and weaken working conditions, undermines the possibilities for American workers who are looking for and ready to work in the agricultural sector. Reducing pay, benefits and workplace protections for working men and women in America seems like an 18th century solution to this 21st century recession. Congress should act immediately in the new session to reverse these regulations and restore essential protections for workers who toil in America’s fields to feed our nation and the world.”

The changes proposed by the Department of Labor and the Department of Homeland Security, would drastically limit recruitment of U.S. farmworker applicants by ignoring established and successful farmworker recruitment practices. It would lower wages by switching to a formula of questionable accuracy which does not even survey farms. It would end the requirement that H-2A employers provide non-local workers with free housing that meets basic safety standards, and would reduce government oversight of applications for the H-2A program.

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